

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
28 September 1983

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON WINDOW; WATT FRUSTRATES THE SENATE
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STAT

Interior Secretary James Watt's most recent off-the-cuff disaster -- "a black, a woman, two Jews and a cripple" - deeply disgusted many, many senators.

Mixed in with the revulsion was a frustration born from their inability to do anything.

True, many expressed themselves in the strongest possible terms, rushing from the Senate chamber to the television galleries in their haste to be heard.

The peak of their power in the Watts affair came with the demands that the loose-lipped conservative resign or, barring that, President Reagan fire him.

But the debacle renewed talk, probably wistful, that, at the least, members of the Cabinet return for a second confirmation hearing if Reagan should win a second term in November 1984.

The idea -- not new with him -- was raised again by Senate Democratic leader Robert Byrd the day after Watt made what even he concedes was a "mistake."

Byrd told reporters "Cabinet members ought to come back" and opined that such a requirement might make them watch their words with more care.

"They would be less inclined to make abhorrent statements like that," Byrd said.

Even assistant Senate Republican leader Ted Stevens, a friend of Watt's who tried to excuse the blunder, said the idea of a new confirmation at the start of a second term was "intriguing."

Asked whether Watts could be confirmed again by the Senate, Byrd said "as far as this senator is concerned, he wouldn't be -- and I'm not alone."

But the idea of a confirmation hearing at the start of a second term probably would not achieve what Byrd has in mind.

A president, coming off re-election, would probably be granted virtually the same consideration as he is at the start of his first administration.

In other words, even if President Reagan -- under the Byrd proposal - sent the current Cabinet to Capitol Hill for approval, the Senate most likely would acquiesce.

As Byrd said, Watt would run into terrible problems. So probably would CIA Director William Casey.

The chances are that Senate Republicans would probably warn Reagan not to send either a Watt or a Casey to the Senate for reconfirmation - and he probably would not.

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